

**POLS 100-3**  
**American Government & Politics**  
**Northern Illinois University-Department of Political Science**

**Fall 2017**

**Instructor:** Michael Sweeney

**Class Time:** Tuesday/Thursday 12:30-1:45 P.M.

**Class Location:** DuSable Hall 461

**Office Hours:** Tuesday/Thursday 10 – 12:15 P.M. and by appointment

**Office Location:** DuSable 476 (POLS TA office)

**Email:** msweeney2@niu.edu

**Course Description:**

The main goal of this course is to familiarize students with the actors, structures, functions, and processes of American Government. Considering that the decisions carried out by the American government affect our daily lives, it is vitally important that we understand how these political decisions are formed and carried out. This course aims to provide students the critical thinking needed to assess and critique the connection (or disconnection) between the philosophic underpinnings and empirical reality of American government.

***By the end of this course, students should be able to:***

- Recognize and evaluate the basic debates and issues in American government & political history
- Identify & describe the key functions of the three branches of government
- Assess the causes & consequences of different forms of political participation, as well as how individuals & groups impact political outcomes in the US
- Explain and critically assess the formal and informal political institutions and their respective roles in American politics
- Explain how government affects our daily lives.

**Required Texts:**

*American Government and Politics Today*, 2017-2018 Edition , 18th Edition  
Lynne E. Ford; Barbara A. Bardes; Steffen W. Schmidt; Mack C. Shelley, II.

**If you are comfortable using an electronic textbook and would like to save some money, the course textbook can be purchased online. Visit <https://cengage.com.au/> and search for the above textbook. Please make sure you purchase the correct edition.**

All other readings will be posted on Blackboard.

## Course Requirements:

**Attendance & Participation:** In order to properly engage the material that we cover over the length of this course your regular attendance is required. To satisfy this attendance requirement I will ask that students submit, either on a piece of paper or notecard, the answers to a short quiz at the end of each class. There are fourteen regular class periods during the course of the semester I will allow for two unexcused absences before I begin to deduct points. Attending class and submitting the end of class questions is not sufficient for receiving full points for this course requirement. You must also be a participant in class discussion which means you ask and answer questions in a manner that reflects that you have read the material for class ahead of time. Posing questions that are not related to the class discussion will not count towards this requirement. If you show up to class and consistently contribute to class discussion, then you will be awarded full points.

**Discussion Questions:** Will be distributed in class during **weeks 3, 8 and 14**. Your responses are due the following week (on Thursday) at the beginning of class. You must complete two of the three questions. Each question is worth **50 points** each (or 100 points of your total grade). If you fail to turn your discussion assignment in at the **beginning** of class on the day it is due, you will receive a 0, **NO EXCEPTIONS**.

Comments need not be long—no more than two or three double-spaced typed page. Strong comments start from a specific part of the reading and answer the question(s) posed. Superior comments will cite specific passages from the text and/other relevant readings (if using outside sources i.e. new articles provide a link in your response) and are written clearly with excellent grammar and spelling.

Please feel free to email me during the week and I will do my best to respond to your email within 24 hours.

**Exams:** There will be an exam after each of the three units. These exams will not be comprehensive but will cover the readings assigned for each unit. The exams may include multiple choice, matching, and essay sections.

## Grading Breakdown:

Attendance & Participation-20% (100 points)

- Attendance-10% (50 points)
- End of class questions-5% (25 points)
- In class participation-5% (25 points)

Discussion Questions-20% (100 points)

Exam 1-20% (100 points)

Exam 2-20% (100 points)

Exam 3-20% (100 points)

**Total-100% (500 points)**

## Grading Scale

A = 93-100% (465-500 points)

C+ = 77-79% (385-399 points)

A- = 90-92% (450-464 points)

C = 70-76% (350-384 points)

B+ = 87-89% (435-449 points)

D = 60-69% (300-349 points)

B = 83-86% (415-434 points)

F > 60% (under 300 points)

B- = 80-82% (400-414 points)

### Late Assignment Policy:

I understand that life can be chaotic and emergencies are prone to happen at inopportune times. That being stated, I will not excuse any late submissions for the reaction papers or makeup exams without proper documentation of an emergency (funeral, hospitalization, car accident, etc.). Even with proper documentation, you must contact me via email, phone, or in person before the reaction paper is due or the exam begins for me to grant an extension unless you are not able to contact me ahead of time in which case contact me as soon as possible to better facilitate you making up the exam or receiving an extension on the paper. Failure to promptly notify me will result in me denying the extension. If you submit a reaction paper late or miss an exam without a documented excuse then you will not receive any credit for it. You know when the reaction papers are due and will have a few weeks to write a topic so excuses such as your internet not working or forgetting to attach the file will not be accepted.

### Extra Credit:

During the semester I will likely provide opportunities for students to earn extra credit. *If* and when such opportunities arise I will make the extra credit available to all students in the class. *If* and when these opportunities become available I will provide guidelines for the extra credit in class (adding more incentive to attend class consistently). *I will not offer individual extra credit to raise your grade for the course.*

### Classroom Decorum:

Although a large portion of this class will be lecture style, there will still be a substantive portion in which the students engage the course material in an open discussion. When I open the class up to these discussions I expect all parties involved to speak in a manner that is respectful of other students. Politics can invigorate our passions but I ask that you temper your opinions and keep class discussion both civil and pertinent to the course material at hand. Considering the proliferation of electronic devices and their usefulness in education, I will allow students to bring and use laptops and tablets in class. Although I do allow these more educational electronic devices, I expect that students will use them in a manner which does not disrupt the lecture or class discussion. Failure to use your technology in an appropriate manner will result in me asking you to put the device away for the remainder of class. Repeated offenses will result in me asking that you do not use said device for the remainder of the semester and will result in a penalization of your participation grade. Cell phone use

is forbidden during class; if you are expecting an *urgent* phone call during class please talk to me before class and I will help accommodate you.

### **Academic Integrity**

Good academic work must be based on honesty. The attempt of any student to present as his or her own work that which he or she has not produced is regarded by the faculty and administration as a serious offense. Students are considered to have cheated if they copy the work of another during an examination or turn in a paper or an assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else. Students are responsible for plagiarism, intentional or not, if they copy material from books, magazines, or other sources without identifying and acknowledging those sources or if they paraphrase ideas from such sources without acknowledging them. Students responsible for, or assisting others in, either cheating or plagiarism on an assignment, quiz, or examination may receive a grade of F for the course involved and may be suspended or dismissed from the university. A faculty member has original jurisdiction over any instances of academic misconduct that occur in a course which the faculty member is teaching. The student shall be given the opportunity to resolve the matter in meetings with the faculty member and the department chair. If the facts of the incident are not disputed by the student, the faculty member may elect to resolve the matter at that level by levying a sanction no greater than an F for that course. The faculty member shall notify the student in writing whenever such action is taken, and the Office of Community Standards and Student Conduct shall receive a copy of the Academic Misconduct Incident Report indicating final disposition of the case, which will be placed in the student's judicial file. In all matters where the charge of academic misconduct is disputed by the student or if the faculty member feels a sanction greater than an F in the course is appropriate (such as repeated offenses or flagrant violations), the faculty member shall refer the matter to the Office of Community Standards and Student Conduct making use of the Academic Misconduct Incident Report. Additional sanctions greater than an F in a course can be levied only through the University Judicial System. With regards to finding the student either responsible or not responsible for his or her action, the ruling of the Judicial Hearing Board shall be binding. In cases where there is either a finding of responsibility or an admission of responsibility by the student, any recommendations by the hearing board regarding the course grade are nonbinding on the instructor, who remains solely responsible for assigning a course grade, consistent with the policies set forth in the course syllabus

### **Statement Concerning Students with Disabilities**

Northern Illinois University is committed to providing an accessible educational environment in collaboration with the Center for Access-Ability Resources (CAAR). Those students with disabilities that may have an impact on their course work must register with CAAR on the fourth floor of the Health Services Building (753-1303). CAAR will assist students in making appropriate instructional and/or examination accommodations with course instructors. It is important that CAAR and instructors be informed of any disability-related needs during the first two weeks of the semester.

### **Religious Observances**

If any course activity (e.g. classes and due dates) coincides with your religious observance, please let the instructor know as soon as possible so that the instructor has the best opportunity to provide appropriate accommodations.

## **Department of Political Science**

Web Site Undergraduates are strongly encouraged to consult the Department of Political Science web site on a regular basis. This up-to-date, central source of information will assist students in contacting faculty and staff, reviewing course requirements and syllabi, exploring graduate study, researching career options, tracking department events, and accessing important details related to undergraduate programs and activities. To reach the site, go to [polisci.niu.edu](http://polisci.niu.edu).

## **Undergraduate Writing Awards**

The Department of Political Science will recognize, on an annual basis, outstanding undergraduate papers written in conjunction with 300-400 level political science courses or directed studies. Authors do not have to be political science majors or have a particular class standing. Winners are expected to attend the Department's spring graduation ceremony, where they will receive a certificate and \$100.00. Papers, which can be submitted by students or faculty, must be supplied in triplicate to a department secretary by the end of March. All copies should have two cover pages – one with the student's name and one without the student's name. Only papers written in the previous calendar year can be considered for the award. However, papers completed in the current spring semester are eligible for the following year's competition even if the student has graduated.

## **Course Calendar:**

The following calendar lists the order of the topics and the date that we will cover them. Please note, we do not read the chapters in chronological order.

### **I. *Unit One: Foundation of (American) Government & Politics***

**Week 1:**       **8/28 & 8/31**  
Course Overview  
Discussion Question Assignments – What is expected.  
Democracy and American Politics  
**Reading: Chapter 1**

**Week 2:**       **9/5 & 9/7**  
The Constitution  
**Reading:**  
    **Chapter 2**  
    **Appendix A: The Declaration of Independence p. 651-652**  
    **Appendix B: The Constitution of the United States p. 653-661**  
    **Appendix C: Federalist 10 and 51 p. 669-674**

**Week 3:**       **9/12 & 9/14**  
Federalism: States and Nation  
**Reading: Chapter 3**

***\*\*\*Discussion question distributed – due next week on 9/21\*\*\****

**Week 4:**      **9/19 & 9/21**  
Civil Liberties & Civil Rights  
**Reading:**  
    **Chapter 4 (all)**  
    **Chapter 5 p. 107-119**  
    **Appendix B: The Bill of Rights p. 662-663**

***\*\*\*Discussion questions due 9/21\*\*\****

**Week 5:**      **9/26 & 9/28**  
Civil Rights continued  
**Reading: Chapter 5**

***\*\*\*Exam 1 – Thursday 9/28\*\*\****

## **II.    *Unit Two: Politics & Governance in America***

**Week 6:**      **10/3 & 10/5**  
Public Opinion and Political Socialization  
**Reading: Chapter 6**

**Week 7:**      **10/10 & 10/12**  
Interest Groups  
**Reading: Chapter 7**

**Week 8:**      **10/17 & 10/19**  
Political Parties  
**Reading: Chapter 8**

***\*\*\*Discussion question distributed – due next week on 10/26\*\*\****

**Weeks 9:**      **10/24 & 10/26**  
Campaigns, Voting and Elections / The Media & Politics  
**Reading: Chapter 9 & Chapter 10 p. 355-364**

***\*\*\*Discussion questions due 10/26\*\*\****

**Week 10:**     **10/31 & 11/2**  
The Media & Politics continued  
**Reading: Chapter 10**

**\*\*\*Exam 2 – Thursday 11/2\*\*\***

**III. *Unit Three: The Institutions of American Government***

**Week 11:**      **11/7 & 11/9**  
The Congress – Representation, Organization and Lawmaking  
**Reading: Chapter 11**

**Week 12:**      **11/14 & 11/16**  
The President  
**Reading: Chapter 12**

**Week 13:**      **11/21 & 11/23**  
The Courts  
**Reading: Chapter 14**

**\*\*\*NO CLASS on Thursday 11/23 – Thanksgiving Holiday\*\*\***

**Week 14:**      **11/28 & 11/30**  
The Courts (continued) and The Bureaucracy  
**Reading: Chapter 14 & Chapter 13**

**\*\*\*Discussion question distributed – due next week on 12/7\*\*\***

**Week 15:**      **12/5 & 12/7**  
The Bureaucracy (continued) & State & Local Government  
**Reading: Chapter 13 & Chapter 18**

**Week 16:**      **\*\*\*Exam 3\*\*\* (Final Exam)**